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ABSTRACT

Beginning a program to recruit minorities (American Indians, Blacks, and Hispanics) to graduate school is discussed, along with retention strategies. Reasons to recruit minorities to graduate school, and specifically to the field of psychology, are identified, including: not all qualified minority students will apply to graduate school; nonwhites can make unique contributions to the core of psychological research, theory, and practice; and minority participation in research and practice will help psychology address issues brought about by changing demographics (i.e., over 30% of the U.S. population is expected to be minority by the year 2000). Activities and materials that are needed at each stage of the recruitment process are discussed: inquiry by the prospective student, application, and admission, and enrollment. The following retention strategies for minority graduate students are recommended: tailoring activities for minority students (e.g., receptions and guest minority lecturers; supporting minority student organizations; including minority issues in the curriculum and training for all students; and hiring minority faculty. (SW)

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Recruitment, Retention, and Graduation of

Minority Graduate Students

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Recruitment of Minority students into graduate programs is not
necessarily viewed as important in the current academic and national
climate. References are commonly made to a "color blind" society, or to
maintenance of "standards" when the issues of special efforts directed
toward minority populations is raised. Well intentioned arguments can be
raised on both sides of these issues. However, it is the case that
minorities remain underrepresented in higher education generally, and in
virtually all fields of graduate education more specifically. Increases
in minority graduate enrollments which occurred in the 1970s have not
continued in the 1980s, and in fact, a decline has begun in many fields.
Even at the peak, the minority enrollments were well below what would be
expected on the basis of proportional representation. Data from ETS
indicates that minority groups (here taken to include American Indians,
Blacks, and Hispanics) are severely underrepresented among those taking
the GRE during 1984-1985, accounting for less than 10% of those taking
the exams. Thus, variety of indicators suggest that the
underrepresentation of minorities is likely to continue for some time.

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Beginning a Recruitment Program

Recruitment at the department level usually involves faculty and requires faculty commitment. Unfortunately, not all faculty believe it is important to make special efforts to increase minority representation. Apart from blatantly racist considerations, one compelling notion is that general principles and practices will emerge without reference to the racial or ethnic background of the psychologists involved. Another is the "cream will rise" position - talent will win out in the end, and any special efforts to circumvent the natural selection process will ultimately work to the detriment of the field at large, and be no great favor to the individuals who are the target of these efforts. These and other related arguments are not totally without merit. It is not the purpose of this paper to debate these arguments - although I fear they are not uncommonly used as rationalizations of the status quo rather than thoughtful conclusions based on considering data and alternate hypotheses.

I do believe that some positive, forceful arguments can be made for recruiting minorities into psychology. While I do not believe arguments such as these will necessarily impel people to action, I will list a few which are worth some consideration. Why recruit minorities?

- 1.) Not all qualified minority students will apply to graduate school. We have some data which indicates that as few as 19% of honors students will apply to graduate school. Some will apply to

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professional schools to be sure. While these data are not specific to minority students, there is little reason to believe (or data to indicate) that minority students will behave dramatically differently. Many of the best students are proceeding immediately into the work force. A recruitment effort can encourage these students to consider post-baccalaureate study. A colleague from ETS reported a minority graduate student's saying: "I didn't go to Ohio State, but [their recruitment program] got me thinking about graduate school." While we would like to get all the good students to our own institutions, we should not be short sighted in looking at the impact of recruitment efforts. The goal, after all, is increased minority representation in the professional ranks - not just in the ranks of first year graduate students in our own institutions.

- 2.) A second argument is that non-whites can make unique contributions to the core of psychological research, theory, and practice. The "general principles" notion presented above obviously has some merit, and might be supported by historical accounts of scientific advances. However, Sue (1983) has written instructively on this point, distinguishing between two approaches to research and practice: an "etic" approach which emphasizes "universals," and "emic" approach which culture specific variables are stressed. These approaches sometimes are in conflict - precisely because of the validity of both.

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The current approaches to psychology, however, seem to emphasize the etic over the emic. If one acknowledges the validity and usefulness of sociocultural variables in approaching psychological research and practice, then the importance of increased minority participation in psychology becomes apparent.

Another related argument was put forth by Robert Dottin (1985), a biologist, who argued for increased numbers of Black professionals. He argued that decisions which affect the lives of Black people are made on the basis of scientific considerations. Blacks and other minorities have a right to participate in these decisions. For example, if more Blacks had been in the medical and scientific ranks, excesses such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, begun in 1932 and ended in 1972, might have been prevented. Perhaps it can be argued that the situation is different now. But also, perhaps, if more Blacks and Hispanics had been involved, directions of research and development in, for example, aptitude and ability testing might have been (be?) different.

Quite apart from arguments based on culture or ethnic or racial considerations, the lack of participation of minorities in psychology and other fields which require advanced study represents a waste of human resources. Robert Reich (1983) has made a related point. A large segment of our American society has been underutilized. Investment in this resource should be no less important than

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investment in oil exploration or other more risky ventures. Much more could be said on this point.

- 3.) The demographics of the United States are changing. By the year 2000, it is expected that upwards of 30% of the U.S. population will be minority (ACE, 1983). The implications for service providers may be obvious. Implications for social policy may be only slightly less so. Participation of minorities in research and practice seems imperative if psychology is to speak meaningfully to issues brought to the fore by this changing demographic pattern.

More could be said of reasons for recruiting minorities. Ultimately, the decision to do so will revert to the department level. At this point I return to the task of building a program at the department level. To make a longer story shorter, I still concentrate on recruitment and retention. More detail is contained in an earlier paper (Isaac, 1984).

Support of Department Chairperson - Available evidence and our experience indicate that success of a program of recruitment is dependent on the support of a person in a position of administrative authority. With such support, many other things flow, including financial and time considerations. In our case, we had such support, and were also able to use ongoing support programs in the University, to which I will return.

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Committee - The first step was taken by the department chairperson in creating an Affirmative Action Committee. The committee has evolved from an active to a more supportive role over the years, but was crucial in gaining credibility for the program with faculty, even if only with the faculty on the committee. The committee was essentially volunteers only, but has been changed over the years. In its initial deliberations, the Recruitment and Retention problems were rediscovered - recruitment ultimately will fail if retention is not addressed. I will address our approach to these problems sequentially, but many things go on in parallel.

Recruitment

Clearly there are many things which can be done which would qualify as recruitment activities, and I will indicate a few. But it is useful to break down the recruitment process into a series of stages. Figure 1 is an indication of the stages, together with some activities which might go on in each. Obviously the stages overlap to an extent.

The first stage is labeled "Inquiry". This is the point at which a name of a prospective student is received. Preceding this point, various devices can be used to generate the inquiries: brochures, letters, campus visits, etc.

The second stage is "Application." This is the point at which a student actually sends all or part of the application materials to the

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appropriate office of the university - admissions or department or graduate school, depending on the university. This stage may involve several stages in itself, a final stage being labeled "completed application." At each stage the conversion rate is of interest. That is, the proportion of entries to that stage which are converted to entries to the next stage. Thus, what proportion of inquiries are converted into applications, applications to completed applications, ... to admissions, etc. These proportions can serve as an index of efficacy of a program or changes in the program. In addition, the actual numbers at each stage are of interest.

The next stage is "Admission." For minority students, this stage probably needs attention in most programs. In our case, a list of all minority groups was monitored by the department vice-chairperson. When admissions decisions were pending, the vice-chairperson called the admissions officers of each department program to determine the status of the minority applicants. In some respects this activity would also fall in the "completed application" stage. The point of these contacts is to both encourage efforts to make needed phone calls to urge completion of applications, and to ensure attention to all minority applications - which may not look as good as other applications if the undergraduate college is not known to the admissions officer. This call also makes it possible to provide information on GRE score percentiles, and the like, relative to other minority students. This procedure has proved useful in ensuring that minority students' applications receive attention and fair treatment.

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Once a student has been "admitted into the program", the choice now becomes open to the student - to accept an offer of admission or not. This is the "Acceptance" stage. Various activities can help convert admissions into acceptances. The main issues are attention and financial aid. Attention means the student has some additional contact with the program. Financial aid means the student may be able to afford to come.

The final stage of the recruitment process is "Enrollment". To convert acceptances to enrollments, further attention is required to ensure the student does not get diverted to something else - a job, professional school, and so on.

I have omitted discussion of the activities listed under each stage in Figure 1. The lists are intended to be suggestive, and certainly are not exhaustive. Different programs lend themselves to different approaches.

Following the enrollment of the minority student, the retention and graduation phases need attention. It does no one any good to enroll students, and then have them drop out before they have a chance to get a degree.

Retention and Graduation

In some respects, it may be more sensible to discuss retention prior to recruitment in that success in retention makes success in recruitment easier. Obviously, a university or program which attempts to make minority students welcome and valued will have more success in attracting

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additional minority students. Further, such an environment is more likely to retain students to the point of attaining a degree. These observations are quite obvious, but tend to be obscured in the press to devise strategies for enrolling minority students in the first place.

Once again, there are a variety of strategies which can be used, but I will outline some of those which we have found useful.

- 1.) Activities tailored for minority students. These include receptions or meetings at the homes of faculty, and guest minority lecturers who visit campus for a day or two. Social as well as academic activities are appropriate.
- 2.) Support of minority student organizations, e.g., Black Graduate Students in Psychology. Such organizations can be a useful support network for minority students for academic, emotional, and social issues. These organizations also can be helpful in the recruitment of new students and in providing feedback to the department or program on minority related issues.
- 3.) Program sensitivity. Minority issues should be part of the curriculum and training of all students - no less than, for example, women's issues. Where minority perspectives differ from non-minority, such differences should be acknowledged and not treated as aberrant. Research topics which deal with minority issues should

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be acceptable. Not all minority students will be interested in such issues, but students should not be discouraged from pursuing them - and non-minority students also may find them of interest. We have also sponsored conferences in which minority issues in mental health research and practice have been addressed.

- 4.) Faculty. The most obvious need is for minority faculty. Clearly, not every program will be able to have an adequate representation of minority faculty in the foreseeable future. However, to develop minority faculty, minority graduate students are the first step. Apart from the desirability of having minority faculty, it is important to have a degree of consensus and support from faculty. Some of the support may be rather passive, but the active interest of some faculty is necessary. Major decisions concerning students are made by faculty. Beginning with the decision to admit and concluding with the approval of the dissertation, faculty have control of the gates through which students must pass on the way to the degree. If the faculty members are not minority group members themselves, a special sensitivity and commitment on their part may be required - whatever the motivation for that commitment, and however short or long term it may be. This is not to say that heroic efforts are required of faculty in order to retain minority students. It is the case, however, that in most programs there are not enough minority faculty to serve as role models, nor do they have the time to

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accommodate the needs of all minority students. Further, the minority student can be quite isolated from the informal contacts - the "hall culture," the "laboratory culture" - which are an invaluable part of the educational process. A sensitivity to the isolation and sometimes special needs may be required.

One manifestation of faculty interest may be in the form of an Affirmative Action Committee referred to earlier. This committee can serve many functions - ranging from programming, to informal support, to advocacy for the minority students. In our case, this committee has been important to the overall program development.

Conclusion

Discussions of recruitment, retention, and graduation of minority graduate students can founder on a variety of sensitive issues - reverse discrimination, lowering of standards, racism, and the like. These issues can be debated on various grounds. There are good reasons, I believe, for increasing the number of minority students in graduate programs - diversity, contributions to the field, changing demographics, and the like. Here I have addressed, in broad terms, a strategy for bringing about this increase - starting with the recruitment of minority undergraduates. Clearly the agenda is longer and must be addressed in its totality before full participation by minorities will be achieved.

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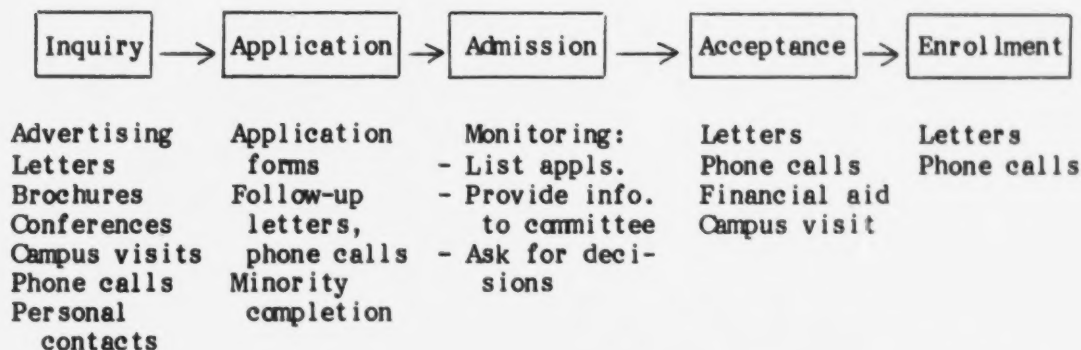
Figure 1.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND GRADUATION
OF MINORITY GRADUATE STUDENTS

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The Ohio State University

APA Annual Convention, August 22, 1986
Washington, D. C.

I. Recruitment



II. Retention and Graduation

- 1.) Affirmative Action Committee
- 2.) Activities tailored for minority students
- 3.) Minority student organization (e.g. EGSP0)
- 4.) Program sensitivity
 - awards
 - minority issues in curriculum and training
 - minority related research topics
 - conference or minority mental health
- 5.) Minority faculty